

THE AVIFAUNA OF OL DOINYO OROK, A FOREST ISLAND: INITIAL FINDINGS

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Ol Doinyo Orok is an isolated hill just north of Namanga, Kajiado District, some 150 km south of Nairobi. It is composed of folded Precambrian metamorphic rocks of the basement system, mostly micaceous schists (Joubert 1957). The hill rises to a maximum height of 2548 m from a peneplain at 1300 m; it extends for 15 km from north to south and 10 km from west to east. The Namanga Forest Reserve, gazetted in 1979, incorporates the entire hill.

The vegetation on the lower slopes is predominantly woodland with areas of bushed grassland. The southern half of the hill, however, forms a basin of internal drainage 18 km in area with a single outlet on the south, the Namanga River; this basin is clothed in evergreen forest with a closed canopy and generally sparse ground cover, interspersed with clearings densely overgrown with shrubs, grass and herbs. The slopes are very steep and soils appear to be unstable; the valley bottoms are often swampy.

The forest is separated by 22 km from a small forest tract on Mt Longido to the south. The extensive highland forest of Mt Kilimanjaro is some 65 km away. Forest 'islands' such as Ol Doinyo Orok are often of great biological interest, yet the hill appears to have been largely neglected by naturalists, possibly deterred by the precipitous slopes and numerous buffalo *Syncerus caffer*.

We camped in the forest from 21 to 24 March 1986, following an initial visit by CG from 14 to 17 February. Our base was in the river valley at 1780 m, at the point where the river leaves the swamps over a rock barrier, before it plunges steeply down towards Namanga town. The surrounding area was dry at the time of our visit, we experienced no rain and early morning dew was light.

THE AVIFAUNA

Birds were trapped during the morning and evening of 22 and 23 March and the morning of 24 March. Four pairs of 12 m mist nets were set on the western slope of the valley, well inside the forest but within 150 m of the river. The following species were caught (numbers in brackets):

Lemon Dove *Aplopelia larvata* (6), Pale-breasted Illadopsis *Trichastoma rufipennis* (2), Yellow-whiskered Greenbul *Andropadus latirostris* (2), Stripe-cheeked Greenbul *Andropadus milanensis* (1), Placid Greenbul *Phyllastrephus placidus* (3), Rüppell's Robin Chat *Cossypha semirufa* (4), White-starred Forest Robin *Pogonocichla stellata* (5), Olive Sunbird *Nectarinia olivacea* (2), Abyssinian Crimson-wing *Cryptospiza salvadorii* (3).

Other species were recorded in or over the forest, or along the river, as follows:

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, African Black Duck *Anas sparsa*, Rufous Sparrowhawk *Accipiter rufiventris*, Mountain Buzzard *Buteo tachardus*, Bronze-naped Pigeon *Columba delegorguei*, Tambourine Dove *Turtur tympanistra*, Olive Pigeon *Columba arquatrix*, Hartlaub's Turaco *Tauraco hartlaubi*, Black Cuckoo *Cuculus clamosus*, Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius*, African Wood Owl *Ciccaba woodfordi*, Montane Nightjar *Caprimulgus poliocephalus*, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill *Bycanistes brevis*, African Rock Martin *Hirundo fuligula*, White-headed Roughwing *Psilidoprocne albiceps*, Black Roughwing *P. pristopectera*, Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*, White-necked Raven *Corvus albicollis*, Northern Olive Thrush *Turdus abyssinicus*, Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brachyura*, Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*, Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, Garden Warbler *S. borin*, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher *Melaenornis chocolatina*, Dusky Flycatcher *Muscicapa adusta*, Paradise Flycatcher *Tersiphone viridis*, African Pied Wagtail *Motacilla aguimp*, Mountain Wagtail *M. clara*, Black-backed Puffback *Dryoscopus cubla*, Tropical Boubou *Laniarius barbatus*, Sharpe's Starling *Cinnyricinclus sharpii*, Collared Sunbird *Anthreptes collaris*, Variable Sunbird *Nectarinia venusta*, Montane White-eye *Zosterops poliogastra*, Baglafaecht Weaver *Ploceus baglafaecht*, Spectacled Weaver *P. ocularis* and Oriole Finch *Linurgus olivaceus*.

Although conditions were dry, there was evidence that several species were breeding or had recently bred. Two White-starred Forest Robins caught were in fresh juvenile plumage, while a juvenile Olive Sunbird was just initiating primary and body moult. A pair of Northern Olive Thrushes was followed by a dependent juvenile. One each of the Rüppell's Robin Chats and Placid Greenbuls captured had a well-developed brood patch, and a pair of Yellow-whiskered Greenbuls was incubating eggs. A male Baglafaecht Weaver was building on a half-completed nest over the river, and Lemon Dove and Bronze-naped Pigeon males were displaying vigorously to attendant females.

Most of the species recorded range widely in the highlands of central Kenya and northern Tanzania. The Tawny Eagle (seen perched on large trees along the river) and Drongo (seen flying from the river into the forest) were presumably intruders from the surrounding woodland. Certain other records are noteworthy:

Rufous Sparrowhawk. One immature bird near the river, 24 March. This is an extension of its Kenyan range, but it is recorded from Arusha, northern Tanzania (Britton 1980).

White-headed Roughwing. This record adds another site to its fragmented eastern range.

Pale-breasted Illadopsis. Two illadopses, apparently adults, were captured together at dusk on 22 March. Their specific identity was determined by use of the key in Mackworth-Præd & Grant (1960), and confirmed from examination of specimens in the National Museum, Nairobi. They were separated from the Mountain Illadopsis *Trichastoma pyrrhopterum* by the generally paler underparts and the

absence of olive-brown on the belly. There was, however, a considerable amount of olive-brown on the flanks, suggesting that these birds might be closer to *distans*, the eastern Tanzanian race, than the nominate western race (*rufipennis*). This record constitutes a remarkable extension of range; the nearest known population is in the East Usambaras, more than 280 km away.

Stripe-cheeked Greenbul. This extends the species' range north-westwards; it is known from Mts Meru and Kilimanjaro.

White-starred Forest Robin. The race of these birds is uncertain, although the proximity of Mts Meru and Kilimanjaro would suggest *guttifer* (Britton 1980). The two young birds captured were in standard yellow and black juvenile plumage. However, another bird, otherwise in full adult plumage, had several head feathers clearly tipped with green (above and behind the eye, and on the forehead). This suggests it might have moulted from the green immature stage, absent in *guttifer* (Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1960). Specimens are needed.

Montane White-eye. The race *mbuluensis* is already recorded from Ol Doinyo Orok, and from the nearby Longido (Britton 1980).

Oriole Finch. At least two pairs, one accompanied by an immature male, frequented the riverbank near the campsite. They waded in the shallow water passing over the rocks and appeared to feed there, perhaps on algae. The very green upperparts and flanks, contrasting with brighter yellow bordering the black of the neck and chest, indicated that they were of the race *kilimensis* rather than the yellower, western *elgonensis*. This is the first Kenyan record of *kilimensis*, which is known from the northern and eastern Tanzanian highlands (Britton 1980).

DISCUSSION

Some avifaunal impoverishment is expected in a small forest island such as Ol Doinyo Orok, and this was reflected in the small number of species recorded - 47 in all. Of course, this number would rise with more time spent in the forest. The presence of Stripe-cheeked Greenbul and Oriole Finch of the race *kilimensis* indicates a stronger affinity with the forests of northern Tanzania than with the more distant highland block of central Kenya.

The discovery of Pale-breasted Illadopsis at Ol Doinyo Orok is most surprising; it is noteworthy, however, that this is the only member of the genus to extend east of the central Kenya highlands. Its present-day distribution is disjunct, with nominate *rufipennis* not recorded east of Kakamega Forest, and *distans* hitherto unknown west of the Ngurus. Presumably its distribution was once more extensive; the Ol Doinyo Orok population might be a relict of a larger range. Alternatively it might have been established by wanderers from the East Usambaras. In either case, its apparent absence from Mts Meru and Kilimanjaro and the Pares is odd.

This interesting forest requires more study, in particular the judicious collection of specimens. Its condition should also be monitored. Although we saw few signs of serious disturbance, its small size, apparent fragility, and proximity to Namanga township must cause some anxiety. Destruction on a large scale would be of more than scientific importance, as Namanga depends for its water supply on the preservation of this catchment area.

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